

# Soldier of fortune returns to Flasher

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**F**lasher's bad boy has returned as the town's favorite son.

And whether you call him Hilaire du Berrier or Harold Berrier, Hal (as he's known in Flasher) is back from his Monte Carlo home and this jet-setting soldier-of-fortune has a whopper of a story to tell.

Saturday, du Berrier was the grand marshal of Flasher's Summerfest of the Century parade. Friday, the town celebrated "Hilaire du Berrier Day."

His initial claim to fame is being the first non-Indian child born to settlers in Flasher. After that, the claims to fame get more zesty and hail from places more exotic than Flasher.

Flasher Mayor Jerry Rhone invited du Berrier (pronounced do barry-a) to the town's state centennial festivities. du Berrier in turn invited 40 of his friends from around the world.



*Hilaire du Berrier was the grand marshal of the parade.*

Among those who showed up was Jim Graves, publisher of "Soldier of Fortune." Graves, who recently covered the war in Afghanistan, has profiled du Berrier in his magazine, which he says has a newsstand circulation of 100,000.

du Berrier's friends who couldn't come to Flasher swamped Rhone with telegrams that the mayor proudly carried with him Saturday.

As du Berrier tells it and townspeople confirm it, he was a saucy lad who resisted the discipline of his strict mother, Fannie Berrier,

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# Soldier: Pay isn't the reward

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who with her husband, William, owned Flasher's first mercantile and the now-defunct Flasher Hustler newspaper.

Mrs. Berrier shipped little "Hal" off to a military boarding school in Minnesota when he was 12. He was expelled in 1924, one month before graduation. Then, says the 83-year-old, "She brought me back to the penal colony (Flasher) to punish me."

Exile on the prairie didn't last long. "I convinced her to send me away for art lessons," he boasts. But instead, du Berrier snuck away for flying lessons in Chicago. "I'd wanted to fly since age 5. I knew flying would be a means to an end. I wanted to do something exciting."

With wings beneath him, he set out for a life of thrills. He took to the air and became a barnstorming pilot. Tired of that by 1931, he escaped to Paris, where he changed his name. "I hated the name Harold, so as soon as I got away I changed it," du Berrier says. "I wanted to live in France and I wanted to be in the French Foreign Legion. But the government said my name couldn't be Hal because you had to be named after a saint. So I picked the name Hilaire out of the air."

As du Berrier frequented Parisian cafes in the early '30s, he became entranced by the tales of World War I soldiers-of-fortune. Before long, he had joined their ranks and was flying missions to Ethiopia, which had been invaded by Mussolini's Italian forces.

Then, looking for another show, as some soldiers-of-fortune call wars, du Berrier headed for Spain to bolster Franco in the Spanish Civil War. But in that war the Italians were on Franco's side, and du Berrier had been blacklisted by Mussolini for siding against the Italians in Ethiopia. Hungry for adventure and wanting to fight the Italians, he reluctantly joined forces with the Spanish Republicans, despite their communist connections.

He says he made little money as a soldier of fortune. "If there is any chance of winning, they don't hire you," he says, "and even if they win it's unlikely they'll pay you in full."

In 1937, du Berrier flew courier

missions for the Chinese Nationalists. Then, early in World War II, because he could speak French, Arabic, Ethiopian and Chinese, he was asked to set up an Allied spy ring in Shanghai to find out whether the Japanese would first advance north against Russia or south against the United States.

Through his connections, he learned the Japanese would move against the Americans. He informed his employers, the Free French spy ring, of this. However, after Shanghai fell to the Japanese, du Berrier paid dearly for his informant's role. He was charged with espionage, he says, and held in a Japanese prison camp for three years.

"For 18 days I sat on the cement floor of a Japanese torture cage," he says. "I looked at my feet and wondered how in the devil did my feet lead me here from Flasher, North Dakota."

His aged, nearly translucent skin still shows the beating he endured in the POW camp. The right side of his face is partially paralyzed and his eye waters sporadically. Still, he is dashing, flirtatious and revels in telling about his exploits.

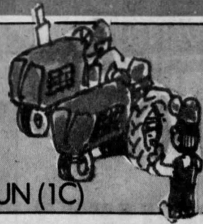
While in the Japanese POW camp, he married by proxy an Eurasian woman who had served as his interpreter in Shanghai. From that marriage came a daughter, Jeanette, who traveled to Flasher this weekend with him. du Berrier had sent his wife to Mandan for the baby's birth, but Jeanette hadn't been back to North Dakota since her birth. He divorced his first wife, and his second wife divorced him in 1983. "She paid me a compliment, though," he says. "She told the judge I'm the only man who ever went from youth to senility without hitting maturity."

He says that when he could no longer fly, he became an adviser, mostly to people with monarchical connections in Southeast Asia. He also wrote a book, "Background to Betrayal — The Tragedy of Vietnam" and is writing another book. He publishes a newsletter called "H. du B. Reports."

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